

Malawi Customs and Cuisine



Located in southeast Africa, Malawi is affectionately known as “The Warm Heart of Africa.” It shares its borders with Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. The major topographic feature is Lake Malawi, a freshwater lake that is home to hundreds of species of fish.

Cuisine in Malawi has remained relatively free of outside influences. Most meals consist of nsima, a thick maize porridge and ndiwo, a relish (or sauce) that varies in ingredients. Nsima is made from cornmeal, corn flour or ground maize. The photo above shows a woman drying maize on a large sheet spread over the ground. While the recipe for starch is mostly the same all over Malawi, the relish is very different from region to region depending on what is grown there. The relish is a secondary element intended to give flavor to the food. In the east of Malawi, it is made mostly from vegetables, as meat is expensive and most people can't afford it.

Rice, cassava, plantains, spinach, potatoes and tomatoes are staple foods. Fruits are plentiful, including mangoes, melons, oranges, bananas, and pineapples. Vegetables are cultivated but are not popular. In limited amounts, tilapia and chicken are the proteins most often eaten. Overall, starches and carbohydrates are the staples the Malawi people rely upon.

Families grow their own food and if they have extra, they will use it to trade for other items.

The Malawi Lake is located in the west region of Malawi. This lake is a great source for various types of fish, including chambo (tilapia), mlamba (catfish), usipa and kampango. A traditional ndiwo made from fish is curried chambo. The main ingredients for this dish are fish fillets, lemon juice, flour, onions, curry powder, fruit chutney and carrots. Chambo (tilapia) is the country's specialty and the main lake delicacy.

Soft drinks are quite prevalent, especially Coca-Cola. Alcoholic beverages are mainly beer (there is a large brewery in Blantyre), a homemade brew called chibuku that is usually produced by women and served in cut-off milk cartons, and a more potent distilled liquor that often causes severe health problems.

Customs

- Verbal greetings are accompanied by a handshake. This is done with the right hand, with the left hand gripping the right forearm to show that one is not armed.
- Stopping to talk on the street is customary, and the conversation continues even after the parties go their separate ways. A person approaching someone's house will often cry "Odi, Odi" to announce his or her presence.
- Visitors are almost always offered a drink and perhaps something to eat. Eating usually is done without utensils, but only with the right hand, because the left hand is considered dirty.
- The men usually eat separately from the women and in fact, the women often kneel to serve them.

Source material: <http://whatscookinginyourworld.blogspot.com> and <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Malawi.html> - ixzz3UIo3GPcF

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